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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
09/827,031	04/05/2001	Edward J. Boyle	40655.1000	4847

66170 7590 12/12/2006

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EXAMINER

HARBECK, TIMOTHY M

ART UNIT PAPER NUMBER

3692

DATE MAILED: 12/12/2006

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/827,031

Applicant(s)

BOYLE ET AL.

Examiner

Timothy M. Harbeck

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 29 September 2006.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 21-34 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 21-34 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☐ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____.

- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____.
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application
- 6) ☐ Other: _____.

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on 9/29/2006 has been entered.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

Claims 21-30 and 32-33 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Shoham et al (hereinafter Shoham US PAT 6,584,451 B1) in view of Gershman et al (hereinafter Gershman US 6,199,099 B1) in view of Halbert et al (hereinafter Halbert US PAT 6,101,484) in view of Bi et al (hereinafter Bi, US PAT 6,311,178 B1) in view of Walker (US Pat No. 5,794,207).

Re Claim 21: Shoham discloses a computer implemented method for facilitating an auction (Column 3, lines 29-31) comprising a consumer defined purchase rule for a selected item (Column 6, lines 52-57, 62-67), retrieving a subset of consumer information wherein said subset comprises consumer information having a similar said

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consumer defined purchase rule (Column 5, lines 16-17). This is the main motivation behind the Shoham invention; to aggregate the buying power of small volume buyers to promote competition among vendors.

Shoham further discloses providing said subset to a vendor offering said item (Column 2, lines 63-65) and accepting a bid for said vendor to provide said item to said subset (Column 3, lines 5-6). While not specifically disclosing that the bid is "accepted," the motivation behind an auction system is for goods to be exchanged between a buyer and a seller. This could not occur unless a bid is accepted. Furthermore, the disclosure of Shoham reads "the seller(s) then sell the goods to all buyers who offered more than the discovered price, (Column 3, lines 5-6)" which leads to the conclusion that a bid was accepted and that acceptance of this offer implies that the vendor was in fact able to accommodate the buyers within the previously defined consumer thresholds.

Shoham further discloses verifying that said bid is in accordance with said consumer defined purchase rule (Column 3, lines 1-5). The fact that the facilitator accepts a bid from a seller leads to the conclusion that the consumer defined purchase rule is met and that the vendor has the ability to accommodate this rule, or else the submission of said consumer defined purchase rule would be moot.

Shoham discloses confirming that said bid is optimum (Column 4, lines 28-40), based on different criteria.

Shoham does not explicitly disclose receiving a user profile comprising rules defined by a consumer and an organization profile comprising organization rules defined by an organization. Gershman discloses software agents responsible for

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making arranging travel plans (Column 2, lines 46-49) wherein these agents consider both individual rules as well as rules and restrictions set by a persons work (Column 32 line 9-Column 33 line 5). It would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art to include the teachings of Gershman to the disclosure of Shoham in order to enforce employer rules preemptively. It is old and well known for companies to place travel restrictions on its employees in order to save money and/or utilize particular partnerships with airlines. In automating this process, the company can allow the user some freedom while maintaing overall control of the itinerary.

Shoham does not explicitly disclose that the consumer itinerary comprising said consumer rules and said organization rules are stored in a database. Halbert discloses a dynamic market equilibrium management system that is adapted for the sale of goods and services through an online buying group formed for the specific purpose of purchasing a particular product. According to the disclosure, for a potential buyer to join the purchasing group, he or she must determine the price at which he or she is willing to purchase the featured item. Halbert then proceeds to read that all offers including the various amounts at which they are submitted are collected and summarized in a database (Column 3, lines 4-10). It would have been obvious to someone skilled in the ordinary art at the time of invention to modify the method of Shoham to include the database of Halbert, so that the facilitator for aggregate buying would have a reference of all consumer itineraries submitted. The facilitator would then be able to compile lists of consumers with compatible itineraries and present them to a vendor and thus maximize the leverage associated with aggregate purchasing.

Shoham also does not explicitly disclose the step wherein there are multiple consumer defined purchase rules for the same buyer. Bi discloses a multi element confidence matching system and the method therefor wherein a consumer can include multiple elements for an offer to purchase a commodity that must be matched with an appropriate counter party before the deal is executed (See abstract). It would have been obvious to anyone skilled in the ordinary art at the time of invention to include this feature to the disclosure of Shoham because in many transactions there are a variety of parameters that could affect ones overall satisfaction in terms of completing a deal. If the consumer is allowed to enter multiple search criteria than they can be assured that any match returned by the system will be as optimal as possible.

Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi does not explicitly disclose wherein said database is a travel reservation database and wherein said item is an itinerary from a travel service. Walker teaches a method to facilitate buyer driven conditional purchase offers that references the purchase of airline tickets as a potential use for the method (Column 8, line 49-56). It would have been obvious to someone of ordinary skill in the art at the time of invention to modify the method of Shoham / Halbert / Bi to include the disclosure of Walker so that participants in the Buyers club could utilize the method for travel reservations since this is a notoriously well known example of a service that is based on a dynamic price scale that is commonly reduced for group rates. A method like the one disclosed by Shoham / Halbert / Bi wherein small volume buyers are aggregated to increase their bargaining leverage with a vendor would be well suited to

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handle these types of purchases. This follows then that said item comprises at least one of a good or service because an airline reservation satisfies this requirement.

Finally while the references do not disclose modifying the itinerary according to the bid, this is essentially just confirming the final itinerary to the customer. In Shoham, the customer lists parameters, which, if met, would satisfy their needs for the product or service. In setting these parameters the customer is setting the bounds of an acceptable agreement and therefore if the supplier can meet these demands, the agreement is consummated. In the broad case the "modifying" is simply just a narrowing from the bounds submitted by the customer, to the actual agreed upon figure. In the case of a travel reservation service, the modifying step would be from the broad itinerary listed as parameters, to the confirmed specific itinerary. Therefore it would have been obvious to modify Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker to include this feature so that the customer is aware of the final details of the purchase and can plan accordingly.

Re Claim 22: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses notifying, via said travel reservations database, said consumer of said optimum bid (Column 2 line 65- Column 3 line 1).

Re Claim 23: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses a method wherein said confirming step comprises determining when said bid provides optimum savings (Column 4, lines 31-34).

Re Claim 24: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses a method wherein said verifying step comprises evaluating said bid based on a proposed price and a proposed provision of said travel service (Column 2 line 65- Column 3 line 5).

Re Claim 25-26: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses a method wherein said storing step comprises storing in said travel reservations database a deviation to said rule and storing in said travel reservations database a restriction upon a deviation from at least one of said consumer rules and said organization rules. Shoham reads "another alternative is to allow the buyer to submit the equivalent of a schedule: buy product A unless product B is 40 dollars less. In that case buy product B. (Column 6, lines 52-54)." In this case the buying of product B would represent a deviation from the original rule to purchase product A. The said schedule then proceeds to apply a restriction that product B must be at least 40 dollars less than product A for the facilitator to apply said deviation from the original rule.

Re Claim 27: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Walker further discloses said travel service comprises at least one of an airline reservation, automobile reservation, and hotel reservation and does not explicitly disclose the purchase of at least one good and service (Column 8, line 49-56).

Re Claim 28: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Halbert further discloses a method wherein said retrieving step comprises scanning said travel reservations database to determine individual

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consumers with similar at least one of said consumer rules and said organization rules, placing these similar individual consumers into said subset (Column 3, lines 4-12).

Halbert reads, "All offers including the various amounts at which they are submitted are collected and summarized in a database (Column 3, lines 8-10)." The process of summarizing the information in the database is interpreted as placing the similar entries together, as this is the main objective and motivation of the Halbert method as disclosed (Column 1, lines 18-23). While Halbert does not explicitly mention the use of "rows" in a database, it is well known in the art at the time of invention that computerized databases (i.e. Microsoft Excel), use individual rows to differentiate between individual entries in a system.

Re Claim 29: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses a method wherein an individual row (consumer entry or request) of said rows is placed into a plurality of said subsets. Shoham discloses the use of "switching goods" (Column 5, lines 3-8) and limit orders (Column 6, lines 61-67). In switching goods, "a buyer can submit a bid for either X or Y, depending on price," which means that the consumer request can be placed into more than one particular subset of products for purchase. In a limit order, a customer may make a request to "buy product A if the price drops below \$300," which means that this particular entry could be placed within any subset of consumer requests seeking to buy product A for less than \$300 (i.e. \$295, \$275, \$250).

Re Claim 30: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra, and Shoham further discloses a method wherein said rows (consumer

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requests) are similar when at least one of said consumer rules and said organization rules differ by less than a predetermined criteria. Shoham states, "The primary function of the mechanism is to automatically aggregate the buying power of these buyers (Column 1, lines 55-60)." In order for these buyers to be grouped together properly there must be some inherent defined criteria to determine orders that are similar. Combining dissimilar requests does nothing to aggregate the buying power of a group, because members of the group would want different things, and this would work directly against the motivation outlined by Shoham.

Re Claim 32: The further system claim would have been obvious by performing the method claim 21 rejected above and is therefore rejected using the same art and rationale of Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker.

Re Claim 33: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra but does not explicitly disclose the step wherein said consumer rules include at least two of price, scheduling preferences, departure airport, destination airport departure date, departure time, arrival data, arrival time, seating preference and special accommodations. Walker teaches a method to facilitate buyer driven conditional purchase offers that references the purchase of airline tickets as a potential use for the method (Column 8, line 49-56). Gershman discloses a user maintaining preferences such as seating preference (Business or First Class) and preferred airlines (Column 32 lines 42-67). It was well known in the art at the time of invention for a purchaser of airline tickets to have a set of rules regarding their travel, with the purchase of the tickets contingent on said rules. Each customer has different agendas

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and they need a way to define this agenda to the airline in order to be satisfied. It would have been obvious to anyone skilled in the ordinary art at the time of invention to include this feature to the disclosure of Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker so that a customer traveling on an airline can be assured that they arrive or depart at the correct location at the correct time.

Re Claim 34: Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker discloses the claimed method supra but does not explicitly disclose the step wherein said organization rules include restrictions on at least two of price, scheduling preferences, departure airport, destination airport departure date, departure time, arrival data, arrival time, seating preference and special accommodations. Gershman discloses a user maintaining a work profile with restrictions on preferences such as seating preference (Business or First Class) and preferred airlines (Column 32 lines 42-67). It was well known in the art at the time of invention for a purchaser of airline tickets to have a set of rules regarding their travel, with the purchase of the tickets contingent or restricted by said rules. Each customer has different agendas and company restrictions and they need a way to define this agenda to the airline in order to be satisfied. It would have been obvious to anyone skilled in the ordinary art at the time of invention to include this feature to the disclosure of Shoham / Gershman / Halbert / Bi / Walker so that a customer traveling on an airline can be assured that they arrive or depart at the correct location at the correct time within the bounds set by the organization.

Response to Arguments

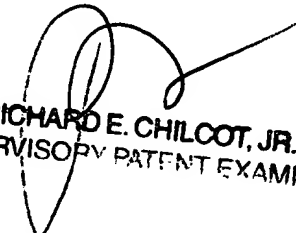
Applicant's arguments with respect to claims 21-34 have been considered but are moot in view of the new ground(s) of rejection. Applicant has added new limitations to the claims and the examiner has provided an additional prior art reference, Gershman, in response.

Conclusion

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Timothy M. Harbeck whose telephone number is 571-272-8123. The examiner can normally be reached on M-F 8:30-5:00.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Richard Chilcot can be reached on 571-272-6777. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.


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